

Iran aide said to give spy data to U.S.

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PORTLAND, Ore. — An Iranian official secretly passed sensitive intelligence information, including maps of Libyan ruler Moammar Gadhafi's headquarters, to the United States two months before American planes bombed Libya last year, according to an Oregon businessman who says he served as an intermediary.

Richard Brenneke, a former CIA pilot, said in an interview that he became a courier for a wide array of intelligence information from Iran while trying to win U.S. approval of an arms-for-Iran deal in late 1984.

He said he and his associates received maps of the Gadhafi headquarters and a number of terrorist training sites in February 1986 from an Iranian air force officer, the source of all the intelligence, and promptly delivered them to U.S. Army and Marine officers through diplomatic channels.

Brenneke said contacts in the Defense Department and the CIA told him that most of the intelligence information he relayed to those officers was accurate and "very, very useful."

On April 14, 1986, two months after Brenneke says he delivered the maps, American pilots launched an air strike against Gadhafi's headquarters inside a military barracks in Tripoli. Gadhafi was not injured, but one of his children was killed and others were hurt. His home and headquarters tent were damaged. Bombs took more than 100 other lives.

Brenneke said the Iranian information identified terrorist training sites in North Africa and the Middle East, and included information on Hezbollah, a Muslim extremist organization in Lebanon that is widely reported to be under the influence of Iran's revolutionary government.

He and two associates in France provided some of the information to French and Israeli intelligence services as well as the United States, Brenneke said.

U.S. military officers whom Brenneke identified as recipients of the intelligence information either de-

clined to discuss the matter or could not be reached.

But court records in New York show that Brenneke and his associates, Bernard Veillot and John DeLarocque, were negotiating a proposed arms deal with Iranian and U.S. officials. Transcripts of telephone conversations, tapped by the U.S. Customs Service, also indicate that the three men were aware of covert U.S. arms sales to Iran, through Israel, in 1985, and appear to have learned about White House discussions about authorizing such sales.

According to the court record, Brenneke wrote to the Department of Defense on Jan. 1, 1986, saying, "If you wish me to discontinue collecting and/or reporting intelligence information to you I will do so. Please let me know."

Brenneke said his letters were delivered to specified military officers by his Portland attorney, Richard Muller, a retired Marine officer.

Brenneke's account marks the first reported instance of intelligence information passing from Iran to the United States at a time when the two countries were publicly at odds. Iran's ruler, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was then denouncing the United States as "the great Satan."

The Tower report

The Tower commission reported Feb. 26 that U.S. officials had supplied intelligence information about Iraq to Iran, and about Iran to Iraq, during the time the National Security Council was arranging covert arms sales to Iran from mid-1985 through 1986.

Asked how he knew that Iran's government supported the Iranian air force officer's intelligence offerings, Brenneke said he sometimes dealt directly, by telephone, with Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani, the speaker of Iran's parliament, and with other Iranian officials he said were involved in the negotiations.

The Iranians were in desperate need of U.S. warplanes and spare parts, Brenneke said, because their U.S.-equipped air force was in calamitous condition.

Brenneke said the source of the intelligence information, air force Col. Kiamars Salahshoor, acknowledged that only five of Iran's F-15s and 10 of its F-4s were operational, and that their pilot-ejection seats had been bolted in place because the mechanisms no longer worked. He described the planes as "suicide machines."

In addition, Brenneke said, some of the Iranians he talked with "did not like the Hezbollah movement" and used Hezbollah to deflect blame for terrorism from Iran.

'Self-serving'

The Iranian officials, he said, had "a very strong desire to indicate that they were not the source of much of the terrorism activity that had gone on. It was a little bit self-serving in that they wanted to keep telling everybody, 'Look, it wasn't us. We didn't do it.' The fact that they may have had some control over the people who did do it, they didn't want to admit."

Whether the intelligence information from Iran played any role in the strike against Gadhafi, or in an Oct. 1, 1985, Israeli air attack against the Palestine Liberation Organization's headquarters in Tunisia, could not be determined.

But Brenneke said the information he and his associates relayed to U.S. intelligence officials included coordinates and descriptions of Gadhafi's headquarters and the PLO headquarters near Tunis, as well as terrorist sites in Libya, Chad, Algeria and Lebanon. He said that Gadhafi's headquarters was specified and that "everything that related to what Gadhafi was doing in Libya was described."

The New York Times reported Feb. 22 that NSC planners had developed a secret objective for the Libya mission — to kill Gadhafi — and that Israeli agents had kept the United States posted on Gadhafi's whereabouts until two hours and 45 minutes before the attack. U.S. officials have denied that the mission was intended to kill Gadhafi.

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Reliable data

Asked if he had received any evaluation of Iran's information from U.S. officials, Brenneke said he had questioned friends in the CIA and the Department of Defense on that point.

"I was told that I was batting well over 90 percent and the majority of it was very, very useful," Brenneke said.

Moreover, U.S. officials urged him to continue transmitting information from Iran even though they were doing nothing to advance the proposed arms transaction in which he and Veillot and DeLarocque were to serve as middlemen, Brenneke said.

He said that French and Israeli intelligence officers also vouched for some of the information.

Brenneke said the Iranians provided the information as an inducement to the U.S. government to permit the weapons sales by his group.

In the initial negotiations, Brenneke said, the Iranians sought a resumption of low-level diplomatic talks with the United States, the release of military equipment purchased by the shah, and new warplanes and tanks for use in Iran's war against Iraq.

In pursuit of those goals, Brenneke said, Iran offered the United States a captured Soviet T-80 tank and help in obtaining the release of American hostages held by terrorists in Lebanon as well as the intelligence information on terrorists and their training sites.

The Brenneke group's proposed weapons transaction fell through, however. Veillot and DeLarocque were indicted in New York a year ago after U.S. Customs agents carried out a sting operation against another group that was trying to arrange an allegedly illegal arms-for-Iran deal.

At the same time, U.S. officials were carrying out a covert arms-for-hostages swap through another set of intermediaries directed by Lt. Col. Oliver North and other NSC officials.

Brenneke said he passed the intelligence information on to Lt. Col. Larry Caylor, of the Army Intelligence and Security Command, and Lt. Col. George Alvarez, a Marine counterintelligence officer. An advisor to Brenneke acknowledged that, at his urging, Brenneke sent his February, 1986 intelligence package, which Brenneke says included the maps and related terrorist information, to the United States through diplomatic channels from the U.S. Embassy in Paris.

Caylor and Alvarez, in turn, passed some information on to Air Force Lt. Col. E. Douglas Menarchik, a security affairs adviser to Vice President Bush, Brenneke said.

Caylor said he was forbidden to comment on the matter, and Alvarez and Menarchik could not be reached.

Brenneke said that the Iranians would not let him keep copies of any material, and that while it was in his possession he was constantly accompanied by Veillot, a former French navy pilot who, Brenneke says, has flown missions for the CIA in Africa and for French intelligence.

"They baby-sat me very carefully," Brenneke said. "Bernard stayed with me during the time I had the information. I read it. I talked to Bernard about it. The sites were marked on a map. And there was some tight text describing in general terms where terrorist training was taking place."

He said Veillot was trusted by the Iranians because he had been flying insecticides and other farming equipment to Iran since 1980, and had known Salahshoor since before the Khomeini revolution overthrew the shah.